Tradition in a Global City?

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The article examines the nature of tradition in the urban environment, and argues that in global cities tradition fundamentally involves relations of power. It opens by defining a vocabulary reflecting conceptual distinctions, such as between popular traditions and traditions of power, continuing traditions and recalled traditions, and negative traditions. It then examines how these distinctions relate to the exercise of power in New York, with reference to the tradition of tall buildings, and the World Trade Center site in particular; and in Berlin, with reference to the rebuilding of symbolic sites in the wake of German reunification. It concludes with a brief look at tradition as a form of resistance.

Are there any traditional environments in a global city like New York or Berlin? Is globalization not the very antithesis of tradition, consciously its negative? Is “global tradition” itself not an oxymoron?

Going even further, is tradition not inconsistent with cities as such? Norma Evenson, for instance, has argued that “cities embody a way of life that has become international, and those seeking tradition will not likely find it in the city.”

On the other hand, are the issues around tradition not quintessentially issues of the city? IASTE’s definition of tradition as “not the static legacy of the past but rather . . . the dynamic reinterpretation of the present” would seem to support such a claim.

Finally, are global cities (the term is itself contentious) really different in their relationship to tradition than older cities? Are they better seen as a new form of city? Or are they simply the extreme form of older, existing patterns?

However these questions are answered, this article argues that while traditions do appear in cities in a variety of ways, they are always related centrally to the distribution of power. Tradition in the context of globalization, then, needs to be broadly defined with the issue of power well in mind.

In global cities, the highly differentiated forms that tradition takes need to be clearly identified and delineated. Fundamentally, however, the uses to which the various forms of tradition are put have to do with the exercise of power: demonstrating it, legitimating it, overcoming opposition to it, concealing it, resisting it, and carving out exceptions to it.
TRADITION IN THE GLOBAL CITY — A CONCEPTUAL VOCABULARY

The “tradition” in traditional environments is usually taken to have a very specific meaning. A classic definition considers it as having two necessary components: “the result of a process of transmission, and . . . cultural origins involving common people.”4 However, I would like here to call such traditions, more narrowly, popular traditions. By this I mean not traditions that are well-liked, but ones that stem from common people (not a term that is itself without problems, but one whose vernacular usage will suffice). And I want to distinguish such traditions from others which I will call traditions of power, traditions that both reflect and enforce the power of their users.

Global cities such as New York, London, or Tokyo make traditional building, in the sense of a popular tradition, very difficult, although not impossible. On the other hand, one could, of course, argue that the majority of residents of cities generally around the world today live in traditional housing (FIG. 1). What, after all, are the traditions of the estimated billion people living in informal settlements and self-built squatter housing? Popular tradition is not limited to rural settlements; it is often a major feature of contemporary cities, sometimes even in the heart of such cities.3

But in a global city, at least in an industrially developed country, traditional housing is much rarer, if not almost by definition impossible. If one looked hard, one might find, for instance, a few casitas (traditional Puerto Rican summer homes) self-built on vacant lots in the Bronx; but they would be few and far between. (Log cabins perhaps also still existed a century ago — but rarely in cities.) Instead, a permanent urban residence, a legal housing unit, must today meet the requirements of an inches-thick set of building-code requirements that “common people” are unlikely to have mastered.

If we relax the definition a little, and substitute Amos Rapoport’s casually referenced “preliterate and vernacular” formulation for the word “traditional,” and if we allow in forms transmitted more formally through written plans and skilled tradespeople, at least some urban housing in nonglobal cities can be considered traditional.5 For example, the typical “three-decker” in older New England industrial cities like Waterbury, Connecticut (often built by immigrant craftsmen from standard plans, or simply from prior experience), is in this sense vernacular — although the plans on which such buildings were based were hardly preliterate.7 But even such buildings are unlikely to be found to any extent in a global city like New York — or at least in its “global” parts (since even the top “global cities” are only in part global). And it would strain the legal system of building regulation in today’s global cities to keep, in a sense artificially and with modern means, anything like a “traditional environment” of such buildings: usually, it is possible to keep at best the facades on a block front or so.

Yet there is another way in which we may view the concept of tradition.

If we ask not, “Is there any traditional building to be found in a global city?” (to which the answer must be substantially “no”), but instead, “What is the relevance of tradition to building and built form in the global city?” (using the term more loosely to describe building that references socially embedded historical patterns of form or construction), then we find great relevance indeed. “Socially embedded” in this formulation is a way of distinguishing tradition from purely individual actions. The dividing lines may be blurred at the edges, but have to do both with prevalence and duration. A possible definition of traditional building as here used might then involve, “the evocation of the past and the claim/reality of its continuation in the present.”

Bearing these distinctions in mind, we may further subdivide traditions (both popular traditions and traditions of power) into continuing traditions and recalled traditions. In a global city like New York, the Empire State Building and the World Trade Center might thus be seen as evidence of a continuing tradition of power, reflected most clearly in an aspiration for dominant height. Meanwhile, the Woolworth Building might be seen to combine this tradition of power/height with a use of Gothic ornamentation — that is, a recalled tradition not alive in the city at the time of its construction.

I would argue that traditions of power, continuing and recalled, are the dominant ways in which traditions in the more advanced societies of the last three millennia are reflected in their built environment. At the same time, popular traditions (historically, generally continuing — today, however, often recalled) have often stood in opposition to these traditions of power, forming in a sense a tradition of resistance to power. This, too, may play itself out in the built environment, such as in the older and least commercially valorized buildings of globalizing cities.
One might also point to a difference between recalled traditions of power and recalled popular traditions. Recall in traditions of power is often artificial, consciously selected from the past — in a sense arbitrarily and artificially recalled; while the recall in popular traditions is more “authentic.” But that issue deserves more discussion than is possible here.

There is one final concept within this discourse on tradition that is of particular relevance to global cities. This is the development of a tradition that deliberately devalues existing traditions of all kinds, in effect creating a tradition, but a negative one, of destruction. There are elements of this in many aspects of modernity, as well as in the postmodern. For modernity, the classic formulation was that of Karl Marx, that “all that is solid melts in air.” The expression embodies a value judgment in internal tension — that progress is desirable, but its attendant destruction is not: the solid is desirable, but so is its continuous replacement. For Marx, such dialectical tension could only be resolved in a new, presumptively socialist society.

Within postmodernity, however, traditions have only ornamental value. Separated from their own histories and meanings, they may be used indiscriminately and arbitrarily, according to an individual architect’s or builder’s aesthetics. As they are thus juggled for alien purposes, destruction need not be physical, but may simply involve an “emptying out.”

If we take traditions to be in general valuable, then the present manifestation of this tradition of change, destruction, and new construction — whether through physical destruction or through emptying out — may appropriately be called a negative tradition. It may thus be understood in opposition to really existing or recalled, or authentic, traditions — although the negative label is clearly a value judgment (as is the definition of “authentic,” which is beyond our scope here), and will vary from one person and situation to another.

So we may distinguish the following types:

- traditions of power
  - continuing traditions
  - recalled traditions
- popular traditions
  - continuing traditions
  - recalled traditions
- negative traditions

**TRADITION IN THE EXERCISE OF POWER**

For each of these types of tradition, a critical question can be asked: Who is using tradition, and for whose benefit? And, more specifically: Is tradition being used by those in positions of power to strengthen that power? Or is it used by those not in power in their own defense or for their own use?

The approach is hardly a new one. As the editors of a Getty Institute volume on heritage conservation pointed out:

. . . heritage [read: tradition] is a social construction: which is to say that it results from social processes specific to time and place. . . . Artifacts are not static embodiments of culture but are, rather, a medium through which identity, power, and society are produced and reproduced."

What is examined in this article is how this view is carried out under conditions of globalization, in more or less globalizing cities. But it may well be that tradition and power are inherently connected, in every society and place and at all times. For example, a reviewer of this article noted, reformulating the argument in this section:

. . . tradition amounts to the way a dominant group embeds social power, which by nature involves shaping the built environment. This definition seems valid since it would also encompass patriarchal authority structures in “traditional” societies, master-apprentice structures in guild or trade-based building cultures, and present-day formations of real estate investment in global cities. All of these would seem to be cases where the haves use the notion of tradition to maintain their interests against those of the have-nots. Tradition thus fundamentally involves maintaining structures of power against the forces of change.

What is tradition other than the power to proclaim it so?"

This formulation expresses well the nature of traditions of power, although it does not address what is here separated out as popular traditions. Furthermore, the suggestion that traditions of power are to be found historically in many societies is important, but is not pursued here.

Tradition, then, in the multiple and complex senses I described in the last section is related to the global city, and to globalization, in the following ways:

- Traditions of power can be built to demonstrate power by the extravagance of scale, bulk, design and cost. Such a tradition goes far back in history, from the Pyramids to Versailles. But in a global age, the scale of megaprojects demands financing on a global scale, and the skyscraper is perhaps its best icon.

- Traditions of power can be used to legitimate power and make its physical representations acceptable to those not benefiting from it — often those excluded from the globalized economy, but living in its presence. Such legitimation may be of the times or it may refer back to established and accepted traditions of power — as when Baroque traditions of power are accepted in a global setting when skyscrapers would be rejected as overly aggressive.

- Traditions of power can be built to legitimate power by purveying the illusion of a common “city” interest in manifesting strength and power, providing competitiveness and anchors to place. In a global era,
this use of tradition may provide greater acceptability for power by purporting to aid in local resistance to homogenization and identity loss, and by helping forge a common identity and pride.

Negative traditions are manifest in the destruction of older remaining traditions, the process being sold as evidence of progress. This may be linked to globalization since the traditions being destroyed may be preglobal or internationalist, and their replacement may be linked to the necessities of progress and competition in a global era.

In these cases the rejection of tradition can be itself a deliberate symbol of power, legitimated through the creativity of its destruction. This negative tradition certainly dates back to the beginnings of capitalist industrialization.

Selective traditions can be manipulated to conceal history as well as to reveal or build on it. This may involve the destruction of popular traditions and their replacement by actions referring back to traditions of power, as will be seen in the discussion of the World Trade Center below.

Simulated references to tradition can be used to destroy traditions, to preempt any hindrance that real traditions might offer to their replacement by purely commodified relationships. Colonial Williamsburg, for instance, may be read as such a commodification that makes the destruction of continuing traditional buildings palatable.

Popular traditions can be recalled and used as resistance to the exercise of power and globalization. In fact, they may be presented as its antithesis, and therefore valued as its opposite.

It is hard to escape in these formulations the implicit identification of globalization with the exercise of power. Such an identification, in fact, reflects reality. Two characteristics are found as part of almost any definition of globalization, of what I have elsewhere called “really existing globalization.” One is the rapid development of technology, particularly in transportation and communication and also in production and construction, which inevitably raises questions of the preservation of traditional forms. The other aspect of globalization is the concentration of control — of power in both economic and political (and cultural) spheres — which also involves dealing with tradition.

But the two components of globalization, of what I call really existing globalization, have different inherent impacts on tradition. Technological advances may build on, incorporate, or be consistent with traditional forms, or may deliberately and respectfully contrast with it. Only when technological advances are coupled with the concentration of control are they in inevitable tension with tradition; and only then do they develop traditions of power.

### PHASES OF GLOBALIZATION

Before progressing further with these arguments, it is important to define the concept of globalization in historic terms. As the call for papers for the 2004 IASTE conference pointed out, it is possible to distinguish three phases of “globalization” that distinguish globalizing cities from cities in earlier periods, without denying in them the continuation of earlier patterns.

The first phase was one of internationalism. This has variously also been called “early global” or “global” — as in the call for papers:

> The idea of a global world was predicated on the promises of a widespread prosperity, of economic globalization, and the further belief that this prosperity went hand in hand with delivering the fruits of liberal democracy. The betrayal of these promises, however, is evident in growing inequalities and increased poverty. It may now be argued that the globalization paradigm is no longer operative because its liberatory potential was never “realized.”

As this passage indicates, the failure of the internationalist vision opened the door to really existing globalization. However, since September 11, 2001, a third phase is possibly underway, variously described using such catchwords as “empire” or “imperialist.” Again, according to the IASTE conference call for papers:

> Some see the events of 9/11 as a symbol of the failure of globalization and the triumph of the local frustrations that it engendered. Indeed, the euphoric ideal of global freedom has been replaced by the very real threats posed by globally unbounded and uncontrolled “others.” It is important to recognize that the post-9/11 era witnesses the rise of a new paradigm, one that we call “Post Global” not because we abandon globalization, but because we need to move beyond its discursive limitations. It is post global because it supercedes the development era of multiculturalism and multilateralism, and replaces it with the concept of a unilateral dominant culture, which shatters the information-happy notion of a singular global village. So, post global is not an end to globalization but the emergence of a different kind of engagement that is sharply at odds with the visions of liberal, multicultural globalization. Here, both religious fundamentalism and imperial hegemony begin to emerge as the new forms of global engagement.

To highlight the depth of these historic forces, the early internationalist phase was already described in the nineteenth century. Here the disappearance of borders and the relaxation of nationalistic conflicts was the hope, and internationalism was seen as liberatory worldwide.

The phase of more recent really existing globalization is generally dated to the early 1970s — in any event, the late
tenth century. At that time, globalization came to embody the dominance of internationally active business firms, and it produced both an increased concentration of wealth and a deepening of poverty and inequality throughout the world — with all nation states to diverse degrees serving the interests of an increasingly global dominant class.

By contrast, today’s new phase is marked by the policies and apparent goals of dominant forces in the one remaining superpower, with military rather than economic strength being used to establish a global regime. In all of these phases, however, the link between globalization and power is tight — and traditions of power serve the process of globalization as well.

It should be noted that the issues involving the relation of power to tradition are hardly new. As I have already mentioned, some may even think of the period we today consider as really existing globalization to have begun several centuries ago. David Harvey has described in persuasive detail a classic example: the role that Haussman’s boulevards played in the destruction of popular traditions and the creation of a new tradition of power. To make his point, Harvey developed a stunning exegesis of a prose poem of Baudelaire’s, in which the eyes of a beggar looking in through the windows of a splendid new café on one of the new boulevards symbolize the change.17

Another symbolic use of tradition may be found in Dubai, site of the 2004 IASTE conference. There, construction is underway for a true megaproject, the Burj Dubai Center, the tallest building in the world (fig. 2). According to publicity for the building, “[its] triple-lobed footprint . . . is based on an abstracted desert flower native to the region.” It also explains that “a subtle reference to the onion domes of Islamic architecture can be found in the building’s silhouette when looking up at the lobes from near the base.”18

Of course, the reality of its triple-lobed footprint can only be perceived from the air. But the reference is nevertheless intended to link the construction, executed in the tradition of global power, with a local recalled tradition. The shape of a fig leaf, however, might be more appropriate for a building that will stand in such stark contrast to the popular traditions that still survive in its surroundings.

Similarly, the manipulation of tradition to expand power is today evident in two major construction projects in New York City and Berlin — the former city acknowledged as being global, the latter stridently claiming to be so. In both we find a tradition of power that in construction and planning seeks consciously to deny tradition, but that ultimately cannot escape reliance on a dialogue with tradition, resulting in compromise with a limited version of popular tradition.

THE CASE OF NEW YORK CITY

Lower Manhattan, including the area on which the World Trade Center stood (but not limited to that site — in planning terms, the definition of a “site” is itself a controver-

![Figure 2. Burj Dubai. Courtesy of Emaar Properties.](image-url)
Act prescribed higher and more expensive standards for multifamily building (fig. 3).

Old-law tenements typically were five- or six-story walkup apartment buildings, described as follows in the Tenement Museum dedicated to explicating their memory:

. . . 20 three-room apartments, typical of their kind, were arranged four to a floor, two in front and two in the rear. They were reached by an unlighted, ventilated wooden staircase that ran through the center of the building. The largest room (11' x 12'6") was referred to in plans as the living room or parlor, but residents called it the “front room.” Behind it came the kitchen and one tiny bedroom. The entire flat, which often contained households of seven or more people, totaled about 325 square feet.

Only one room per apartment — the “front room” — received direct light and ventilation, limited by the tenements that would soon hem it in. The standard bedroom, 8'6" square, would have been completely shut off from both fresh air and natural light, but . . . the bedroom had casement windows, opening onto the hall, that appear to be part of the original construction.

There was, of course, no toilet, no shower, no bath; nor is there any indication that water was available within the apartments, although water from the Croton aqueduct had begun to flow into the City by the early 1840’s. The building’s privies, located in the rear yard, might or might not have been connected to the sewer pipes running beneath [the street].

These buildings were not built by their occupants, but by speculators interested in maximizing rental revenue from the small (25-foot-wide) lots on which they typically stood. Thus, if their occupancy was traditional, the built form and environment were not. Their form reflected a tradition of power, not a people’s tradition. They were the dominant form of structure on the eastern side of Lower Manhattan through the middle of the twentieth century.

This history was also reflected in the fact that the western side of Lower Manhattan was the site of a thriving, partly Near Eastern, community at the time it was cleared for construction of the World Trade Center in the 1960s. The World Trade Center displaced this community in favor of an ensemble deliberately intended to represent global activity and the city’s dominance therein. All traces of what had existed there, the older tradition of immigration and commerce, were wiped out — not without protest, yet very effectively.

No popular tradition legitimated the World Trade Center, only the wealth and power of its builders. In keeping with then-current policies of slum clearance and urban redevelopment, the tradition called on was rather that of the ruthless destruction of popular cultures, social relations, and ways of life in the name of a progress — all of which served to extend the power of the dominant classes. This was the tradition encapsulated by Marx’s phrase “all that’s solid melts into air” (fig. 4).
Of course, the World Trade Center was only the latest and tallest (at that time) representation of the dominant tradition of building in globalizing cities. We are all familiar with it. One can see it develop and march along in any of the innumerable comparisons of building height, in which the steady reaching for the label of “tallest building in the world” was the prize sought (Fig. 5).

Today that tradition remains alive and well in New York. Even relatively progressive good-government organizations like the Regional Plan Association cannot escape it. Their alternate plan for the second largest development site in New York City, the mid-West Side rail yards, is subservient to it, and proposes a series of mega-highrise office towers.

And, of course, following 9/11, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation’s first illustration of the possibilities at the World Trade Center site were so extreme in their service of this tradition of power that they were almost unanimously rejected. Resistance to such proposals is a popular tradition which New Yorkers also like to claim; and eventually, some 4,500 people from New York and the tri-state area gathered on July 20 and July 22, 2002, at the Jacob Javits Convention Center to play a role in rebuilding Lower Manhattan. Over the course of the day-long forums, participants in “Listening to the City” deliberated options for redeveloping the World Trade Center site and considered a range of other issues needed to help people rebuild their lives and memorialize those lost.

Clearly, the exercise of power by the dominant interests in cities like New York has to take into account such popular feelings. Economic desires cannot, after all, find fulfillment without relying on state action, and this is subject to political as well as economic influence.

But one may also find reference to older traditions used in defense of the dominant pattern in a variety of ways. The oldest and simplest is probably through decoration. One case already mentioned is the Gothic embellishment applied to the oversized structure of the Woolworth Building, in its time the tallest building extant. But decoration can also be used to conceal buildings, as with the huge billboards placed in front of office towers adjacent to Times Square, arranged so as to distract attention from their otherwise overpowering bulk.

One might speak in these cases of the commodification of tradition, continuing or recalled: tradition embraced, ornamented and modified — or concealed — all as the financial interests of their developers and owners might dictate. Such a toolkit follows economic interests, however, rather than leading them.

In city planning terms, the preservation of the New York street grid in Lower Manhattan today reflects similar issues. The grid itself is an interesting example of the metamorphosis of a tradition of power into a popular tradition. Imposed on the anarchic development of Manhattan in 1811 by a state Board of Commissioners to facilitate the purchase and sale of real estate, it has now become a hindrance to the construction of megaprojects like the Trade Center; yet, it is popular because it makes easier finding locations in a large and complex part of the city.

Megaprojects, increasingly enabled by the globalization of investment and concentrations of control in cities high in the global hierarchy, are demonstrations of power, of the ability of (often globally based) dominant interests to impose their will on the preexisting structure of a city. In resistance to that display of power, insistence on maintaining the grid in New York today may be read as an effort to maintain a more popular tradition.

In reality, even this type of resistance can be manipulated and made meaningless. For instance, the executed plan for Battery Park City extends the grid street pattern of Lower Manhattan, but only after separating Battery Park City from it by a wide, heavily traveled street that is best crossed by means of elevated walkways linking the buildings on either side. As a result, one can neither experience, nor even see, the grid as continuous.

Ironically, recognizing this incongruity, most planning proposals after 9/11 called for sinking West Street so that the grid could in fact be meaningful. But all these proposals were shot down as too expensive. Thus, the internal power and functioning of Battery Park City will remain the same. It hardly matters whether one sees it as a megaproject (which it is), or as “following” the traditional grid pattern of the city — a connection that is more easily observed from the sky than on the ground.
Tradition can also be manipulated in more subtle ways. One of the most aesthetically daring examples involved Daniel Libeskind’s proposal for his celebrated Freedom Tower. The building combined the traditional pursuit of height and power (victory, for the time being, in a global competition) with a veneer of legitimating historic references. Among these were both the building’s proposed height — 1,776 feet (a purely public-relations gesture having nothing to do with aesthetics or efficiency of built form) — and a twist in shape intended to evoke the memory of the Statue of Liberty (fig. 6).

Such a contradiction between power-driven business goals and populist overlay was never really viable, however. And this is now being demonstrated by the fact that what will actually be built will keep neither of these original public-relations characteristics. Instead, the Freedom Tower will look like any other in the series of gigantic office towers, with a bow to greening in its upper stories and a surrender to security in its lower.

Ultimately, Libeskind’s desire to couple the demonstration of power with an argument for its legitimacy was doomed to failure. However, this approach is but one example of what has become a new pattern, one pressed to become a new tradition by those seeking both to compete in the global game of power and influence and find support from local, place-based forces that might otherwise be expected to resist the impact of their projects.

The problem is a simple one, to which Manuel Castells, among others, has called attention. Globalization, with its homogenization of almost all aspects of Habermas’s life world, evokes popular resistance. And this resistance to the loss of identities and cultures and traditions often relies on the preservation of the past in opposition to the new. Amos Rapoport has referred to “a declining place specificity of traditional vernaculars (as opposed to the time specificity of high-style and popular design).” Resistance to globalization takes place where it can.

The power of the resistance is such that even high style today may be an attempt to create place specificity. Examples are many, not only involving elements of the movement for historic preservation, but also the drive within many cities to establish height limits, contextual zoning, and architectural review. The obviously and grandly displayed new, often with height as its emblem of power, is exactly what the local and tradition-recalling protest resists.

Resists . . . unless. Certainly, Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is ostentatiously new, expensive, globally produced, and globally in competition. Yet it is accepted, indeed welcomed, solicited, sought after. Why? Because, ironically enough, its rupture with tradition establishes a new pattern that
uses that very rupture to establish a traditionally local identity, one specifically linked to the city in which it is located.

In this regard, John Urry speaks of the tourist gaze as resulting “from the basic binary division between the ordinary/everyday and the extraordinary.” The growing number of Gehry-type manufactured icons are this type of “extraordinary” phenomena; in effect, they convert all viewers into tourists, who recognize their identities in what they see, but are separated and see them only from the outside. Even when such buildings give popular pleasure, it is pleasure derived from what “they” did, not from what “we” did.

Likewise, Gehry’s design logic for the museum in Bilbao was also said to embody references to the harbor activities and forms near which it sits. But these were as shallow and public-relations oriented as were Libeskind’s references to the Statue of Liberty. If the Gehry in Bilbao references waves in its forms, that is hardly something specific to the locale, for it is found in almost all of Gehry’s buildings, regardless of how far they are from the water. What gives the Bilbao Gehry its appeal is not its connection to the local, but precisely the opposite — its connection to the global. But this is the technological component of the global, not the centralized, homogenized, economically driven extension of power which conventional globalization represents for so many.

The pattern is becoming so widespread as to be almost a new tradition in itself. New York had no “Gehry” a year ago; within the next few years it hopes to have five. It will even have one at the World Trade Center site, to house one of the cultural institutions to be located there, without Gehry ever having produced even a sketch of what it might be. It is enough that his name promises novelty, something different, something high-tech. A “Gehry” is now a commodity.

Lower Manhattan’s Santiago Calatrava-designed transit station is in the same pattern (Fig. 7). Its ostentatious display of technology creates an unmistakable and easily identifiable form, perhaps subliminally holding out the same promise that technology held in the early days of internationalist globalization. In this sense, and in the playfulness of form that such efforts manifest, one may even see a bow in the direction of the liberation that early globalization seemed to promise. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that this building serves the center of global economic power. And it is functional to, legitimating, and indeed glorifying of that power.

This involves the same tension between freedom and power, tradition and rupture with tradition, power and the popular, that one might read into developments such as Chandigarh, Brasilia, or the Israeli Parliament building. Even Disneyland shares some of this tension.

THE CASE OF BERLIN

The treatment of history in the latest wave of construction in Berlin is another example of the manipulation of tradition in the service of power. Here the redevelopment of Potsdamer Platz provides a striking example of the demonstration of power through the erasure of old popular traditions. As the technological prowess and wealth of the new occupy center stage, the creators of the new image have made the merest of bows to historic preservation to demonstrate their awareness of the old: one building housing an older “historic” restaurant has been incorporated in the new megaproject.

Berlin is the story of the World Trade Center towers all over again. But the case of Berlin, billed as the largest construction site in Europe, is more historically complicated. Here the purpose of new construction and renovation is, paradoxically, both to conceal history and to recall it in distorted fashion.

History in Berlin runs deep, and historical honesty might involve reference to Bismarkian nationalism, Prussian militarism, German anti-Semitism, an abortive revolution, fascism and the Holocaust, military defeat, the Cold War, the divided city, and state socialism. There are thus two contradictory layers of history when it comes to dealing with tradition: one based on actual history, and one based on the repression of undesired parts of that history to legitimate new paradigms of rule.
One can see these attitudes with regard to what remains of the old East Berlin. After World War II, the East German government initially opted for traditional forms in its portion of the city. But the traditional scenography of the StalinAllee was soon abandoned for massive prefabricated housing construction, held out to be beyond tradition, something of a new world. The rhetoric, of course, was of the old internationalism; but the reality was the need to oppose really existing globalization in the West.

Today, in the newly united Berlin, all traces of that episode in history are being consciously eliminated. Emblematic is the destruction of the former Palace of the Republic. Debate still rages as to what to replace it with. Reconstruct the old palace of the Kaisers? Emulate the highrise symbols of really existing globalization in Potsdamer Platz? Or try for a presumptively post-traditional new style as in the buildings of the Government quarter and the rebuilt Reichstag?

If a reconstruction of a palace of the Kaisers is selected, it will represent a blotting out of all that has happened in German history essentially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to create a lineage that goes directly from the Baroque to the postmodern. The dishonesty of the effort has produced an outcry against the proposal, and the result is not yet quite clear.

The reconstruction of the Reichstag provides an even more complex mixture of recall and repression. The building has an important, but conflicted place in German history. Originally built in 1884 under William II, it was intended to be physically imposing — an impression somewhat out of concord with its function as the seat of a largely powerless parliament. The dishonesty of the effort has produced an outcry against the proposal, and the result is not yet quite clear.

The reconstruction of the Reichstag provides an even more complex mixture of recall and repression. The building has an important, but conflicted place in German history. Originally built in 1884 under William II, it was intended to be physically imposing — an impression somewhat out of concord with its function as the seat of a largely powerless parliament (Fig. 8). Nevertheless, the story of its construction reveals how traditional forms may be interpreted differently. As it is recounted:

Paul Wallot won the competition for the design, and designed the building to reflect Italian renaissance, Gothic, and baroque styles. But he also wanted to make it uniquely German. Unfortunately, there was no Germanic style of architecture so he incorporated regional touches to distinguish it from the other great building of Europe from which it is drawn. But the controversy didn’t end there. Wallot faced continued pressure and opposition to his design. When it was finished, it was a masterpiece with four towers 46 meters high symbolizing the four German Kingdoms united and a central cupola 75 meters tall to honor the head of state, then Kaiser Wilhelm II. Of course, opposition followed — this time from the very person the building was meant to honor. Wilhelm II hated the cupola. He saw it as a symbol of parliament, rather than a reflection of himself. Wilhelm believed in a military government, and the parliament was of little use to him. To drive this point home, the opening ceremonies on 5 December, 1894 were reminiscent of a military parade with even some members of parliament wearing Prussian uniforms. By 1892 the Kaiser has started referring to the place as the Government Ape House.

In reality, then, for many years the building could be read as a mere facade of power, concealing both the absence of power there and the fact that real power was held by the Kaiser’s inner circle. However, the building’s fortunes changed with the end of World War I. The German Republic was proclaimed from it in 1918, and for a brief interlude until 1933 it served as a center of German democracy. However, the memory most associated with it is its burning on February 27, 1933, an event used as the pretext for the political crackdown that began the Nazi party’s seizure of absolute power.

Today, even the shell that could have recalled that event has been obliterated. Nor is there a trace of its occupation by Soviet troops at the fall of Berlin in 1945. Indeed, only one stone with Russian graffiti was preserved, and that only after some dispute. Rather, the Reichstag was completely rebuilt in 1995, with a new cupola designed by Sir Norman Foster.

While there had been a cupola on the original, Foster’s new dome made no reference back to it. Rather the point was to be ostentatiously new, ostentatiously high-tech, ostentatiously political. Parliament would be represented as sitting underneath it, working in all transparency. In reality,
however, visitors can see almost nothing of the proceedings within it from the public vantage point afforded by the dome, and are thoroughly insulated from the proceedings there.

Here then is a building in the tradition of power, that first served as a facade concealing its absence, and which now provides a pretense of transparency while concealing institutional insulation. The new and glamorous bubble makes it seem as if a building housing a major seat of power is a tourist attraction open to all. The false suggestion is that it was added to an old and venerable building as a continuation of a tradition of democracy, when in fact democracy has had a most troubled past in this country.

Thus again, playing with tradition, both using it and negating it, serves the interests of power — both in expressing the existence of power and at the same time concealing its exercise.

TRADITION IN RESISTANCE TO POWER

Popular traditions, of course, also reflect relations of power, and in many cases they are themselves the result of the exercise of power. Traditional societies obviously had their own internal structures, generally patriarchal, often based on religion, with ordered relations more proximately relying on force than in later times. But in global cities popular traditions also often stand in opposition to traditions of power. This may happen in several ways.

First, popular traditions may support the existence of communities exercising independence from dominant structures of power. Ethnic enclaves in New York City, for instance, may develop their own economies, within limits, including their own trading customs, institutions for the resolution of disputes, and building types. There are, of course, severe limits to how far such independence can go. Building codes may or may not support alternative forms of construction. And zoning laws may or may not allow alternative forms of family or business usage — for example, industrial work at home or a mixing of commercial and residential activities. Traditions will play a role in cementing such alternative forms, but they will as often be defensive as creative of new forms. Identity politics is a reflection of different continuing and recalled traditions in the political arena, and may interplay with traditional built environments in a mutually reinforcing manner.

Opposition to power may also make use of negative traditions: burning an oppressive flag, tearing down the built monuments of power, attacking and physically wrenching a building apart (one thinks of the Bastille in the French Revolution, the palaces of the royalty or the czars, or even the attacks on public buildings in the recent uprisings in the suburbs of Paris, or in Detroit or Los Angeles). In a less extreme form, opposition to various plans for redevelopment, “slum clearance,” or megaprojects often relies on historic traditions, sometimes continuing, sometimes recalled for the occasion.

In a globalizing era, the entire juxtaposition of the local with the global may be seen as an issue of interpretation and uses of tradition, with the local being linked to popular traditions and the global reflecting traditions of power. At an individual level, the tension between the two may be reflected in patterns such as resistance to imposed “foreign” eating habits. Thus, on the one hand, the yellow arches of McDonalds have become the symbol of progress, of the benefits of the market, the advantages of globalization — of the replacement of tradition by the global economic market. But on the other, they have also become the symbols of an enemy, around which some of the forces of resistance have rallied, relying on local culinary traditions and housekeeping habits for their legitimation.

Beyond more personal traditions, the local/global difference in traditions is one of scale. But scale reflects the exercise of power and the opposition to it as well.29 The defense of traditional environments is, whether thus intended or not, necessarily a defense of the local against the global, in support of popular traditions against traditions of power. Thus it becomes entwined with struggles around globalization, the power of international institutions, the growth of world economic and social forums, issues of free trade and human rights, and so on.

Power is, after all, a matter of politics. And the consideration of tradition in the global city must be coupled with a realization that the search for a constructive solution to the tensions involved is in the end also a political quest.

It remains to be seen what measures may in the end provide protection for the traditional environments and the local identities and independence that the forces of globalization threaten. But the recognition of the relationship between power and tradition, in new forms in the globalizing cities of the world, is a matter that might be of high priority to those concerned with the human impacts of the built environment.

REFERENCE NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was presented as a keynote presentation at the 2004 IASTE conference in Sharjah, U.A.E.


9. The relationship between the Bauhaus in Germany in the 1920s, the poster child for modernity in architecture, and the recalling of popular traditions in the Werkbund and crafts activities, would bear closer examination in this context.
11. The comment of an anonymous reviewer of this paper, to whom I am grateful. It should not be implied that he/she agreed with all of its text.
15. Ibid.
16. The history of globalization, of course, goes back far, and indeed its major current attributes were limned by Marx as early as 1848, but it is the more contemporary changes that concern us here.
23. The quote comes from the Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’s Communist Manifesto, but it was expanded in precisely the sense represented by the destruction/construction at the World Trade Center site in M. Berman, All that Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988).
24. For a full discussion of the concept of globalizing cities, see Marcus and van Kempen, eds. Globalizing Cities.
25. A report on this event is now available at www.listeningtothecity.org.
Violence and Empathy: National Museums and the Spectacle of Society

C. GREIG CRYSLER

This article compares the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., with the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa. While dealing with different historical contexts, both institutions seek to embody models of tolerant national citizenship in their visitors by immersing them in narratives of collective violence, death and ultimately, national rebirth. I examine these museums in relation to the emergence of similar institutions around the world, and argue that they reinvent pedagogies of citizenship and consumption that can be traced to spaces of public exhibition and display in the nineteenth century. I suggest that the practices of empathetic identification employed by both institutions can be located within contemporary practices of consumer spectacle and prosthetic self-fashioning, and are intertwined with the rise of affective labor and global economies of desire. In crafting idealized models of citizenship based on the simulated experience of national violence, both museums attempt to contain politically charged histories in a museological past, where they can be curated, commemorated and instrumentally separated from the violence of nation-state in the global present.

It is now widely accepted that national institutions such as museums, capitol complexes, government buildings, stadiums, airports, and even highway systems are important spaces for the invention of national histories, identities and traditions. The national museum (whether of science, art or history) has typically been conceived as both a container of important objects and as a didactic object in itself, one that works to inscribe and reproduce national history through its very form. The museums of the nineteenth century were typically organized around a model of progressive history. The agents of history (bourgeois white males) were shown engaging in heroic struggles as the development of the nation-state unfolded through a linear construction of historical time.
Museums narratives represented the present as the utopian conclusion of national development, thereby positioning the viewer at the apex of history.

This article examines examples of an institutional genre that departs from these conventions of national representation. The museums I will discuss do not tell the story of the enduring genius of a collective national imagination; nor do they climax in a display of heroic achievements carried out in the name of the nation-state. They are dominated by reconstructions of state-orchestrated violence and brutality, and attempt to produce memories of collective pain and suffering among visitors who often have no direct experience of the events depicted.

Generally speaking, such museums can be placed in two broad categories. The first are located at the physical sites where collective violence took place. These include concentration camps, forced-labor camps, mass graves where victims of genocide are buried, and prisons where political detainees have been held and tortured. Some of the most prominent of these have formed an international coalition of “sites of conscience” to develop “transferable practices” and encourage “dialogues for democracy.” The second group consists of museums that re-create historical sites of violence within their walls, and are often removed from the locations where the events they describe originally took place. Often costly and based in large cities or national capitals, they routinely attract hundreds of thousands of visitors per annum.

Though it is clearly intertwined with the larger history of the public museum, the experiential museum of national trauma is a relatively recent development. Many of the key examples have entered the planning stage or have been constructed over the last two decades. Two prominent examples include the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles (1993) and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. (1994). Both employ elaborate restagings of the Holocaust to teach the values of appropriate citizenship. The programs of both institutions have been integrated into the criminal justice system. Perpetrators of hate crimes, as well as police officers, judges, and others involved in law enforcement, attend the museums to learn the virtues of tolerant behavior by consuming a spectacle of its reverse.

Other examples include the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, opened in 2004 in Cincinnati and dedicated to the history of the underground railroad, the name given to the clandestine routes to freedom created by abolitionists for slaves fleeing the southern U.S. before Emancipation. It contains a simulated journey that includes an actual slave pen (moved into the museum from its original location in Kentucky) and culminates in a “Hall of Everyday Heroes.” A growing number of similar institutions have opened in other countries, including the Museum of Memory in Argentina, the DMZ Museum between North and South Korea, The Jewish Museum in Berlin, and various proposals for Apartheid museums in South Africa, including a building in Johannesburg that I will discuss in greater detail here.

These experiential environments are aesthetic phantasmagoria: they fuse architecture, film, textual narratives, artifacts, and re-creations of buildings and landscapes into elaborate technologies of citizenship. However, their most distinctive feature is often the intimate linkage they forge between memory and affect by displaying the emotional experiences of others. They construct a sensuous engagement with the past, one that, in its appeals to embodied experience and emotion, attempts to supplement (and in some cases even supersede) forms of rational cognition that have historically structured the national museum. A museological prosthesis solicits the visitor’s identification with a collective subject of history that undergoes escalating experiences of pain and suffering, and is ultimately reborn as a model citizen. These “fatal attractions” are organized around the therapeutic administration of simulated trauma. The museum constitutes diverse visitors as a collective subject of traumatic history, and then provides a way to overcome, confront, or “work through” the conditions of their subjection through ritualized acts of empathy and commemoration.

How can we explain the emergence and proliferation of these emotional theaters of collective memory? Why have they emerged with such force at this point in time, and where do they fit in the history of the national museum? Inasmuch as museums of national trauma involve critical reflection on the historical project of the nation-state, they are consistent with one of the central characteristics of what has been described as “dark tourism”: a tendency to produce anxiety and doubt about the project of modernity by revealing the failure of its inner workings. The national museums I will discuss here unsettle assumptions about the capacity of the nation-state to guarantee progress, only to reinscribe such assumptions on different terms.

In this discussion I concentrate on how contemporary models of national citizenship are defined and implemented from the standpoint of curatorial approaches, visual and textual exhibition narratives, and architectural design. I will not deal with ethnographic analysis of how visitors respond to, and even transform the intended meanings of the museums. While the latter analysis is important, it by no means replaces the need to understand how museums conceptualize and institute discourses of national identity. The mapping of “technologies of citizenship” constitutes an important first step in a larger study that would include ethnographic analysis along with other analytical strategies.

MUSEUMS AND CITIZENSHIP

The relationship between museums and citizenship has been studied at length in recent scholarship. One of the most seminal accounts is by the historian and cultural critic Tony Bennett, as presented in his book The Birth of the Museum. This by now well-known account is relevant for
my purposes here because it argues that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century museums played a pivotal role in defining the terms and conditions of an emergent civil society. Overall, the institutions of display Bennett discusses — which range from museums and libraries to department stores, fairs, and world expositions — came to comprise an “exhibitionary complex.”

A key means of creating this new culture of exhibition was to transfer objects once held in enclosed and private domains to public arenas, where they could inscribe and broadcast messages of power. Bennett argues that the exhibitionary complex was not only concerned with transferring knowledge which had previously been the exclusive property of the sovereign into an expanding public domain. The spaces in which these artifacts were shown also displayed the public to itself, making the museum-goer both a subject and an object of the exhibition. The terms of this visibility granted a new importance to the panorama as an optical system that allowed the individual to perceive him- or herself in relation to an orderly crowd. The exhibitionary spaces Bennett describes permitted the spectator to see, and be seen, in relation to others.

The constitution of a citizenry took place in an era of nation-building, and so the process of forming an orderly, self-regulating public was also a process of forming a collective national body. As Bennett noted, detailed studies of nineteenth-century expositions consistently foreground the ideological economy of their organizing principles, transforming displays of materials and industrial processes into art objects and material signifiers of progress, where progress was considered a collective national achievement, with “capital as the great co-ordinator.” In this way, power is “subjected by flattery” and placed on the side of the people by affording them a place within its workings. The exhibitionary complex thus defined what might be termed a pedagogy of consumption. At the world’s fairs, workers were transformed into consumers; products were displayed in ways that mystified how they were manufactured and stressed their intended meanings as commodities and the unique powers attributed to them.

Initially it would seem that experiential exhibitions such as the Holocaust Memorial Museum do not fit easily into the history of the universal museum described by Bennett: their narratives are organized around national failures and tragedies; and they construct a path that leads toward the dystopian terminus of the nation-state, rather than an elevated plane of utopian achievements and success. Nor are they primarily concerned with displaying the collective genius of the nation-state through the progressive development of an enlightened rationality. Instead, they spectacularize the failures of that rationality. Yet the differences between these models are not quite so stark. While taking the nation-state down to a point of near annihilation, the apocalyptic moment creates an opening through which progressive history can begin again. In doing so, these museums ultimately reclaim the nation-state as a vehicle for the realization of collective identity on terms that represent important continuities and differences with the nineteenth-century model.

These buildings form a global network of institutions. As such, they articulate what Frederick Buell has called “nationalist postnationalism” — not only in relation to the idealized identities they seek to constitute, but in the processes they employ to do so. Buell has argued that a new breed of cultural nationalism has emerged, to meet the demands of “postnational circumstances.” Both museums embody this paradox. On the one hand, they seek to teach the lessons of national history through the selective reenactment of often horrifying national events. On the other, they are designed, constructed and operated through a range of processes that exceed the scale of the nation-state: they are bound together by financial and professional networks, flows of visitors, geopolitical events, and — as I will suggest below — a shared system of narrative representation that employs the Holocaust as its structuring metaphor. Both museums draw upon, and help define a global space of national imagining.

My discussion begins with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C., which has, by virtue of its size, prominence and wealth, become a global collection point, research center, and tourist destination for everything that is associated with the Holocaust. As its name suggests, USHMM brings the function of the museum and memorial together in a mutually constitutive relationship, one that is necessitated by the precipitous decline in Holocaust survivors. Most estimates suggest that less than a quarter of the original population of 100,000 camp survivors remain alive. The USHMM is distinctive because it seeks to keep memories of the Holocaust active through an array of institutional practices that mimetically reproduce an event in order to transfer the memory of it to visitors, who are then encouraged to memorialize what they have experienced. The USHMM is a particularly apt example for this discussion because of the disjunction between memory and location it defines: it seeks to instill memories of an event that did not take place on U.S. soil, in order to construct an idealized model of U.S. citizenship. The Holocaust is thus employed as an instrumental narrative, a teaching tool and a therapeutic exemplar — something that is outside the direct experience of most visitors, but nevertheless assumed to be of fundamental relevance to the project of constructing appropriate models of national citizenship.

It is important to note that while the vast majority of visitors to the USHMM have not had direct experience of the Holocaust (either as operators, survivors or liberators of the camps), given the ubiquity of Holocaust representations and the varied use of the term itself, it is likely that most will have encountered Holocaust representations prior to visiting the museum. These mediated memories not only help to shape how visitors understand what is presented to them in the museum; they also shape the texture of what is presented.
as objective testimony. As has been demonstrated in the Holocaust literature, testimony by survivors varies over time as different signifying systems influence how events are recalled, as the temporal distance between the witness and the event increases, and as the context of retelling shifts. Such changes underscore the status of memories as relational and intrinsically unstable. They are shaped by the situations in which they are remembered.

The second museum I discuss is the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa, whose implicit goal is to celebrate the death and rebirth of the South African nation-state. The Holocaust is not mentioned explicitly in the museum narrative itself, though the design of both the building and the exhibition was inspired in part by the USHMM. The Apartheid Museum shares with the USHMM an investment in popular media. In this case, the museum narrative is constructed in large measure out of international news reportage, documentary photography, and film footage, much of which had previously been banned in South Africa. For this reason, many visitors from within South Africa may be far less familiar with the images and testimony presented than those who visit the USHMM.

The instability of memory poses one of the principal challenges faced by both institutions examined here. Each seeks to stabilize both sides of the exhibitionary transaction, by surrounding testimony with the aura of authenticity (and hence objectivity) through the use of film, photographs, and oral history, and by immersing the viewer in sensory-rich environments that encourage the process of self-abstraction to take place. The powerful mechanisms devised to solicit the visitor’s identification with presented narratives are therefore at least partly defined in relation to the diversity of backgrounds and experiences of their audiences. Both museums impart knowledge through the simulated experience of the suffering of others. The idea is that the museum experience “feels” real enough to be remembered as such; this is how the museum narrative hopes to align diverse constituencies of visitors with a singular Jewish or nonwhite subject of history, whose pain they are intended to feel, and whose suffering they are meant to share. These intentions transform the exhibition interior into a continuously modulating sensory experience that passes through archetypal stages of decline, death and rebirth.

The attempt to symbolically appropriate, traumatize and reassemble populations through identification with violent narratives of death and transcendent rebirth can be understood in relation to the contradictory position occupied by the national museum in an increasingly interdependent, if conflict-ridden world. At a time when diverse, sometimes opposed populations define the nation-state, the problems of managing difference from within in order to maintain the coherence of the national community (and allegiance to national values) have become paramount. Spectacular representations of the agony of specific groups become a means to overcome the historical basis of difference — or at the very least, to reformulate it on starkly different terms. Once cultural difference is identified with pain and suffering, it is placed in the past, where it can be memorialized, remembered, and operated upon as something separate from the present.

Both of these museums contain a vast number of images and artifacts, but I will only deal here with the two significant (and similar) moments in each narrative. The first occurs after a long downward spiral through history, when state-orchestrated violence reaches its peak. The second occurs at the end of the exhibition, when both narratives culminate on a plateau of memory, framed by the nation-state of the present. These two moments are significant in the aesthetic program of the museum because they are the points of transition; they reveal the process of empathetic identification at its point of greatest exertion, and in doing so, show its limits most fully.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIES AND THE SUBJECT OF HISTORY

The design of the USHMM and its permanent exhibition has been discussed at length elsewhere, including an article I co-authored with Abidin Kusno after the building opened. Here, I would like to build upon these earlier arguments, stressing the way the permanent exhibition and its enframing architecture operate together to define an idealized model of national citizenship.

The idea of a locating a Holocaust institution adjacent to the Washington Mall emerged during the Carter administration, following its controversial decision to sell a fleet of F-15 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia in 1978. Strong reaction to the sale by domestic Jewish groups ultimately led President Carter to establish a Commission on the Holocaust, with Eli Weisel as its chair. The commission prepared a report that called for a permanent museum dedicated to the Holocaust in Washington. The USHMM was built on one of the last available pieces of Federal land adjacent to the Mall, and was constructed with private funds. Like all the other buildings in the Capitol district, this one was subject to a series of regulations governing the height, massing and materials of new buildings. The architect, James Ingo Freed, of Pei Cobb Freed and Partners, turned these requirements to an advantage by investing the main facade with brooding references that evoke the stripped-down classicism of Fascist Germany.

The permanent exhibition is located on the upper floors of the museum, and is entered through the Hall of Witness, a large entry area that attempts to evoke Nazi landscapes of deportation and terror using twisted architectural geometries and prison-like windows and steel gates. The path of visitors through the museum is determined in advance; they must travel by elevator to the fourth floor, then descend sequentially to the third and second floors. Each floor encompasses a specific historical phase: the fourth floor examines the rise of
Nazism; the third focuses on the Holocaust itself; and the second examines its aftermath.

On the first floor all arriving visitors are given a mock passport of a Holocaust victim. They are then ushered into large, stainless-steel elevators reminiscent of railway boxcars. The passport is intended to foster identification with the narrative and personalize its rendering of history. Once inside, a film made by troops approaching a concentration camp appears on a video monitor. The voice of a soldier recalls the scene, and asks in disbelief how the horror of the camps could have happened. As the video concludes, the doors open at the fourth floor to reveal a large backlit image of an open pit filled with dead bodies, with soldiers standing on the other side of it. A panel to the left of the photograph explains that it was taken by a U.S. soldier (fig. 1).

The entry sequence is designed to allow visitors to occupy the position behind the soldier’s camera. In doing so, the strategy attempts to construct an equivalence between the contemporary visitor, who may have no direct understanding of the Holocaust, and a typical soldier who may have approached the camps at the end of World War II without foreknowledge of their existence. This strategy has also become an important means of gaining access to the public imagination elsewhere in the museum. References to soldiers and the military have recently been extended well beyond the permanent exhibition. For example, banners of the military units that liberated the camps now line the building’s main corridors, and it is possible to purchase the crests of these battalions from a mobile gift cart on the second floor (fig. 2). The Education Center also features an exhibition called “Witness to History: Documenting the Path of American Liberators” which tells the story of how military photographers and filmmakers represented the liberation of concentration camps (fig. 3).

The U.S. military is identified with the soldier as photographer, who in turn becomes the vision and the voice through which significant moments in the exhibition are represented. A parallel chain of associations is constructed in relation to the highly differentiated Jewish communities that were destroyed by the Holocaust. The generalizing force of the narrative turns many Jewish communities into a single, collective Jewish body that is attacked, tortured, murdered, and ultimately reborn as a survivor and witness. Three metonymic figures — the soldier/museum as witness, the Jewish victim, and the Holocaust survivor — thus provide experiential points of reference for the narrative. Each position is a reduction of the many to the one — a pure archetype formed out of the subtractive distillation of diverse parts to create a single whole. The narrative oscillates between these three positions as it unfolds, but it is on the third and second floors, where the story is concerned with the implementation and aftermath of the Holocaust — and hence the positions of the victim and survivor — that I want to examine it in more detail.

The third floor, dealing with the Holocaust, is structured quite differently from the floor above, which describes the rise of Nazism. While the fourth-floor display is dominated by extensive written texts, and requires visitors to move slowly through a linear exposition of history, on the third floor visitors may move freely between displays in the setting of a mock concentration camp. The scene is entered by passing through one of the boxcars used to transport victims to the camps. After this, a passage leads through a “genuine replica” of a concentration camp gate complete with artificially induced rust. Beyond this is a flattened image of the train station at Auschwitz, defined by a black-and-white photo.
mural of the station platform. A long gray bench placed in front of the image is turned to face the entrance to a portion of a camp barracks. The doors to the barracks are open, and just beyond, a low circular wall contains a group of video monitors that are angled upwards (fig. 4). The vaporous blue light they cast draws a crowd. The monitors show archival footage of Nazi medical experiments and are difficult (not) to watch. A passage leads from the barracks toward a reconstruction of a crematorium furnace. The bodies that figure so prominently in earlier stages of the exhibition are now gone; it is a landscape of the absent presence. An empty boxcar, an empty train station, empty bunks, piles of victims’ shoes: these are all powerful icons of loss. Whether standing beside an empty bunk or looking at indistinguishable figures being pushed into a pit, the reduction of historical Jewish subjects to a sentient outline creates an opening for displacement and self-projection.

After passing a crematorium furnace, the exhibition route then leads downward to the second floor and the final part of the display called “Last Chapter.” This retells the past we have just “experienced,” but represents it through the formal and informal testimony of survivors since World War II. When viewed as a whole, this part of the exhibition offers a catalogue of the different ways in which Holocaust survivors have become witnesses — whether through personal recollections given as a part of a massive attempt to document the words of every living survivor (funded by Steven Spielberg’s Shoah Foundation34), or through the televised legal testimony made in courtrooms of international law.

These different forms of testimony are displayed in a chronological order that is socially symbolic. Near the beginning of the display, a bank of televisions offer continuous black-and-white replays of Nazi trials, beginning with Nuremberg and concluding with those initiated by Simon Wiesenthal, the “Nazi hunter” who later became the inspirational force behind the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. These constitute a metaphorical courtroom space, where the visitor is placed in the position of a witness. At the other end of the room, another kind of testimony is given: the full-color, emotional counterpart to the courtroom shown on the little TV screens. Here images of the survivors, many of whom are filmed in their homes, float on a screen that is framed by walls of Jerusalem stone (fig. 5). They tell stories of subterfuge and heroism within the camps, of escape, of being hidden and saved by others. There are many halting moments when words dissolve into unrestrained displays of emotion.

The space between the full-color present and the black-and-white past defines two contrasting moments in the post-war history of Holocaust survivors. The change in the status of the survivor occurs alongside a change in the context of testi-
mony, from the courtroom to the amphitheater at the end of the exhibition. In making the shift, the museum foregrounds what literary critic Shoshana Felman has called the juridical unconscious. For Felman, trauma is the “unconscious” of the trial, the pain and suffering that is there but cannot be translated into legal terms, and cannot be arbitrated through legal processes. Felman suggests that the Nuremberg trials were the first to use the material resources of the law to achieve a symbolic exit from the injuries of traumatic history. In staging the historical transition of the juridical unconscious the USHMM leads us to a utopian point. By the end of the exhibition, the nation-state has been resurrected, but now is a silent background, a static and timeless frame in which emotional testimony of past injustices take place. In other words, the state becomes a framework for the symbolic ventilation of emotion as an index of citizenship. This interrelationship is fixed in a final transition that takes place just beyond the exit from the permanent exhibition.

The Hall of Remembrance follows the conclusion of the permanent exhibition. It is a hexagonal room clad in the same stone used on the main facade — the limestone of official Washington and its public monuments. The slot windows at the corners of this interior space reconnect it to the other memorial spaces on the Mall, effectively turning it inside out. The names of concentration camps, grouped according to geographical regions, are carved into black granite panels. Rows of votive candles line the space below the inscription. While the amphitheater of testimony contains images of survivors describing their experiences, the Hall of Remembrance is silent by comparison. It is dedicated to interiorized acts of commemoration — private recollections that occur in the allegorical space of the nation-state invoked by the “exterior monumentality” of stone walls and deliberate framing of Mall vistas. Visitors are left alone with their memories, whatever they may be. The nation-state is symbolically reconstructed as a mute frame that enables a multitude of private unarticulated actions in public. The ideal citizen is

Figure 5. The theater of testimony at the conclusion of the permanent exhibition at the USHMM. The theater plays a film that features the testimony of Holocaust survivors and their struggle to survive during and after the Holocaust. The walls of the theater are clad in Jerusalem stone, and, as is the case with the Hall of Remembrance that follows it, symbolically encode the nation-state as the guarantor of collective memory.

Figure 6. The Hall of Remembrance, just beyond the conclusion of the permanent exhibition at the USHMM. Both the inside and outside of the hall are clad in the same stone required for buildings in the Capitol district; slot windows focus visitors’ acts of remembrance on nearby U.S. monuments.
both a victim and witness. The two terms are now placed in a temporal order in which the victim is that part of a past remembered in the safe enclosure of the national present.40

PRODUCTIVE INSCRIPTIONS

In his book Present Pasts, the cultural critic Andreas Huyssen has argued that Holocaust discourse has been appropriated and reworked to represent other forms of national trauma.41 He has called these reworkings “productive inscriptions,” because the Holocaust is understood as something that allows new meanings to become part of public memory. I would like next to examine this process of (re)inscription, through the case of the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa.

In its early stages of development, plans for the Apartheid Museum were guided by Solly Krok, a prominent South African for whom the project was part of a larger deal with the government of national liberation in 1994. Krok made his fortune selling toxic skin-lightening cream during the height of influx controls (the cream is now banned in South Africa, but sold legally in the United States).42 Krok had initially sought permission to establish a casino within a theme park operated by his conglomerate in suburban Johannesburg. Permission was only granted with the proviso that this conglomerate would finance the design, construction, and two years of operation of a museum of national significance.

Krok initially envisaged a museum that would present the history of South Africa in broad terms, potentially reaching back thousands of years to construct a deep history of pan-African culture.43 However, a visit to Washington in the early stages of the design process convinced him to shift the topic of the museum to address the rise and fall of Apartheid through “something emotional and theatrical” that would “complete the history of South Africa.”44

The museum that resulted from this process has now established a dialogue with the casino and theme park across the street (fig. 7). The casino represents a parallel history of Apartheid, told through nostalgic references that range from tinted photos and reproductions of furniture from the colonial period to relics of a “white-only” restaurant from the now-defunct Carlton Hotel, which have been preserved in a luxury dining room for casino patrons (figs. 8, 9).45 It is an instance of Bennett’s exhibitionary complex writ large, where two themed environments organized around different registers of emotion (nostalgia and suffering) and cultural codes (low and high) are joined together into one contradictory narrative by the passage of visitors between the two sites.

The exterior of the Apartheid Museum employs the same strategies of ironic mimesis as the USHMM, but in different terms. Where the USHMM transforms Washington’s official Classicism into something that evokes Nazi Germany, the Apartheid Museum adopts a form that is redolent of an urban prison, containing terrible secrets that are now on public display (fig. 10).46 The building is a windowless, walled enclosure made of industrial brickwork, stone, and poured concrete, complete with its own simulation of the precolonial landscape. Ironically, this inward turn also replicates the post-Apartheid “gating” of Johannesburg as a whole.47

Once inside the museum, views are framed that randomly cast visitors as prisoners (fig. 11). However, rather
than entering a faux box car/elevator to travel to the main
exhibition, here the visitor passes through a large gate, pur-
chases a ticket, and is arbitrarily classified as “white” or
“nonwhite.” Two entry doors corresponding to the classifica-
tions then lead into the exhibition area. Once inside, the vis-
itor passes along a corridor lined with rows of pass books
that frame the view toward a life-size image of a racial classi-
ification committee, photographed behind an imposing table
(Figs. 12, 13).

Like the USHMM, the Apartheid Museum presents a
story of oppression “from above.” The administration of
Apartheid policies is represented as an intensifying system of
regulations and controls, and as in the USHMM, the narrative
structure is conveyed in the three parts: decline, death and

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure8.png}
\caption{(Left) A photograph of the lobby of the first Carlton Hotel in Johannesburg (built in 1906), on permanent display in the Gold Reef City Casino, in Johannesburg. The interior of the casino displays pictures chronicling the history of South Africa.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure9.png}
\caption{(Right) The Three Ships Restaurant inside the Gold Reef City Casino. The restaurant is a reconstruction of a restaurant by the same name previously located in the second Carlton Hotel, built in 1973 in central Johannesburg after the first was demolished in 1963. The reconstructed space uses plates and flatware from the original hotel. The second Carlton Hotel closed in December 1997, after the migration of leading businesses from the center to the suburbs.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure10.png}
\caption{Entrance court at the Apartheid Museum. Visitors obtain tickets here and pass though a prison-like gate. In the distance, a concrete cube contains the final stage of the exhibition narrative, a memorial to the ideals of democracy after the formal end of Apartheid.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure11.png}
\caption{Imprisoned visitors at the Apartheid Museum. The museum is designed to evoke a prison. Views within the exhibition make visitors part of the display, enframing them as both captors and prisoners.}
\end{figure}
rebirth. In this case the “Rise of Apartheid” starts in the colonial period of the nineteenth century, when the practices of spatial segregation and the discourse of white supremacy were institutionalized. After the ascent of the National Party in 1948 and its subsequent consolidation of power, the story is told primarily through the actions of the state, and the embodied targets of those actions become an index of its brutality.

Although the breadth of racial classifications is ambiguously captured by the use of the term “nonwhite,” the aesthetic systems of the museum work to position the narrative as an opposition between black and white, reducing the complexity of racial difference within the larger “nonwhite” category in the same way that difference between Jewish cultures are blurred at the USHMM. The extensive use of black-and-white documentary photography reinforces a dichotomous rendering of history — one that focuses to a great extent on the African National Congress and its leadership as metonyms for the entire “nonwhite” population. White is identified with the Afrikaner state and its instruments of oppression, and the collective image of whiteness becomes interchangeable with the policies and covert tactics with which it gained and held state power.

Black, as a monolithic category for everything that is “not white,” is increasingly identified with the embodied experience of oppression, and is represented in stark terms through enlarged representations of humiliation, deprivation, and later torture and death. Although there is mention of the role that colored, Indian, and mixed-race populations played in the history of Apartheid, these groups gradually disappear from the narrative, and an undifferentiated black population becomes the subject of history. The construction of a unitary collective body out of a diversity of political histories and identities is made possible by gradually stripping away the social and historical specificity of blackness until it dissolves into a transparent symbol of universal humanity. The most powerful moments of semiotic conversion are also the most solitary; thus, the growing abstraction of blackness is mirrored by the increasing spatial and acoustic isolation of the visitor.

Processes of self-abstraction converge in three climatic scenes that follow one after the other mid-way through the exhibition. These comprise the conceptual turning point in the story line, where the collective victim achieves a unitary status, is murdered, and is then reborn as a subject of mass resistance. The first scene in this sequence is of diamond mine workers stripped for a body search. The photograph is from Ernest Cole’s 1968 book *House of Bondage*. When first encountered, the image is perceived separately from both its textual (and wider historical) context. It is enlarged to life size, and viewed at a distance, from within a darkened passageway. The visitor is thus placed in a space of double indemnity, where one looks through the museum’s keyhole (the passageway) in order to look through the photographer’s keyhole (the viewfinder). The control of the searched by the searcher represented in the photograph is repeated in the space of the museum, magnifying the tension in the original scene. The anonymous figures in the image are arranged in a repetitive sequence with their faces turned to the wall.

The process of stripping down continues in a subsequent tableau, an execution chamber where one noose hangs for every political prisoner executed under Apartheid (fig. 14). A narrow entry gate to this section of the exhibit requires each visitor to enter alone, symbolically passing through the hanging bodies of the (transparent) dead before leaving the room. Inside, the ropes are clean and white, and the lighting is carefully adjusted to cast shadows through the nooses. There are no accounts nearby to help distinguish the people signified by
the nooses; rather, they merge together into a single, tangled pattern. The long shadows of visitors fill the shadows of the nooses as they move, one by one, through the space. The scene is reminiscent of a number of moments at the USHMM, but most closely recalls a point where visitors pass underneath a three-story chimney-like void. That space is also covered with human shadows — nameless photographs of all the residents of a single village exterminated by the Nazis (fig. 15).

The execution chamber at the Apartheid Museum is followed (not preceded) by the third important scene. This is a display of three solitary confinement cells, whose doors are left ajar — as if to underscore the reversal from death to life.

Following these three central images, the remaining portions of the exhibit embody the stark opposition of black and white populations in increasingly violent encounters of mass mobilization (fig. 16). The exhibition route passes through representations of mass uprisings that followed the Afrikaner-only language policies of 1970, the imposition of an extended state of emergency, and the growing international isolation of South Africa in the 1980s. In this sense, the Apartheid Museum’s stress on resistance throughout the narrative helps to differentiate it from the USHMM. The seeds of an alternative idea of the nation-state are present in the story from the very beginning. Central figures in the armed struggle are shown sabotaging government installations, organizing marches and walkouts, and moving between secret locations. At the end of the exhibition the characters are reversed, and the visible figures of resistance become the leaders of the reformed nation-state — ones who are, it should be added, almost exclusively male.  

The narrative draws to a close with a final transition, one which, as at the USHMM, defines the passage from a black-and-white past into a full-color present. Amidst smiling pictures of a national family sit clusters of voting booths that equate democracy with the act of casting a vote. The final stop on the journey magnifies this solitary moment, as the exhibition terminates in a concrete cube pulled away from the main building and surrounded by water. Inside resides a second cube made of glass, whose permanently sealed walls contain unopened copies of the new constitution (fig. 17). A bridge bisects the glass cube and permits only single-file movement, each visitor separated from the next on a short march to the present. It is an image of nation in which collective agency is confined in the past, where it can be remembered, curated, and reflected upon — but not...
mobilized in the present. Like the memorial chamber at the USHMM, it represents the nation as a mute container that is simply there, outside culture and history.

The museum constructs a model of citizenship not only through what it chooses to display, but also through the social process it sets in motion in order to do so. The current curator has come to the Apartheid Museum after working for the City of Johannesburg for 21 years. The museum is as much an allegory for the presumed benefits of privatized and “unbundled” public services in the present, as it is a story of past wrongs made right. There is inevitable competition between the museum and the city’s Department of Cultural Affairs. Both seek, in different ways, to be the point of entry for an overarching space of national representation, in which all other museums will, it is imagined, eventually fit. In this respect the Apartheid Museum also recalls the USHMM, which has made its mark in part by becoming a global headquarters for Holocaust remembrance. The Apartheid Museum is currently being marketed to international tour operators as a “gateway” to South Africa’s emerging heritage industry. And efforts are underway to make it a headquarters for training primary- and secondary-school teachers in a new curriculum in national history. Though the museum is metaphorically buried in the ground, it seeks to control the air space of national memory.

The model of political rationality the museum constructs converges with the national policy toward the past. Recently, controversy has surrounded attempts by a group of Apartheid survivors to seek reparations from multinationals that benefited from the system. The Mbeki government initially opposed the plan, arguing that it conflicted with the larger “national purpose” of placing Apartheid in the past — viewed as a necessary first step toward attracting global investment. Though a process was later put in place that allowed the claims to proceed on a limited basis, the struggle illustrated the instrumental value of memorials to state terror in the global present. A stable collective personality is a necessary attribute of the global self-fashioning of nation, and therefore it is not just Apartheid, but the fractured political agency that dismantled it that must be collected together, symbolically compartmentalized and deactivated. It is a project to which the Apartheid Museum contributes through a narrative of universal history, in which mass agency is converted into silent, individual voluntarism, and contained in a timeless volume.

SPACES OF EMOTIONAL CONSUMPTION

The two museums examined here constitute subject-forming mechanisms: each is comprised of narrative structures, a set of aesthetic practices, an architecture. Though they deal with very different historical conditions, the fate of the idealized model of citizenship they represent is similar. In both cases, the stories of decline, death, and rebirth of the subject of history and the nation-state terminate in a present where identity is defined through (simulated) experiences of (past) national traumas. Historical experience reaches its climax as emotional experience, which is rendered as a symptom of larger spiritual themes (evil and good, loss and redemption, pain and joy). Both museums suggest that if the layers of historical trauma are peeled away, one will be left with the shimmering, but ghostly essence that is common to all. It is precisely the idea of immanent universality that enables the Holocaust narrative to be treated as a portable metaphor for the human condition, and that allows it to be used to represent historical trauma in other national contexts.
Both the museums operate through representations of the absent presence, where the collective subject of history ultimately becomes a transparent outline defined by differing intensities of human emotion. In doing so, the museums try to replicate historical experience on terms that will make it accessible to diverse an audience as possible. The subject of history is gradually revealed as a generalized image of “humanity,” while the viewer’s sense of self is simultaneously diminished through immersion in darkened interiors and bombardment with sounds and images. In this way, both institutions attempt bring the subject and object of history into alignment by attempting to dissolve both into sublime emptiness.

In both cases, the representational process negates the social and historical condition of the bodies it seeks to describe, a paradox that is central to the operation of empathy. As Saidiya Hartman has noted, empathy seeks to counteract callousness to the suffering of others by positioning the body of the spectator in place of the body of the victim. The goal is to make suffering visible and intelligible; yet in making the other’s suffering one’s own, that suffering is occluded by the other’s erasure. The ambivalent character of empathy can thus be located in the displacement of otherness that occurs as we feel ourselves into those we imagine as ourselves. We project ourselves into the position of the victim on our terms, and in doing so we convert the other to the same.

The pathological rhetoric that surrounds both museums underscores the link each forges between consumption and citizenship. These museums are not only spectacular theaters of prosthetic memory; they are also spaces in which emotional experience becomes the immaterial object to be consumed. As with the manufactured goods displayed in the nineteenth-century exhibitions, the pain and suffering on display is a product of machinery whose inner workings are hidden from view and mystified. Just as nineteenth-century expositions sought to initiate and maintain the ideological separation of production and consumption, so too do museums of the violent national past separate the consumption of historical suffering and pain from the specific bodies in which it was experienced. They disappear through the process of empathy, a mode of acquisition that structures the reception of affect. The traumatic commodity is relocated in a mythic narrative of national progress that culminates in the eternal present of the nation-state. Emotional experience thus becomes the object(ive) of identity, something to be remembered and memorialized.

However, the act of emotional consumption cannot be understood outside the moralizing narrative that makes it desirable, even necessary. It is the promise that the consumption of affect will lead to a more tolerant self that sustains the entire process, makes the simulated violence endurable, vicariousness seem noble, and the negation of others an urgent necessity. Indeed, both museums ultimately insist on the simple claim that the consumption of the museum experience will lead, in and of itself, to the production of a more tolerant citizen. Yet the meaning of tolerance in both cases is vague and ambiguous at best, and expressed in the most general terms. This is because tolerance is presumed to be the consequence of consumption; it is not something produced through social struggle or institutional change, but rather the outcome of witnessing its simulated reverse.

If the nineteenth-century exhibitions worked to transform industrial workers into consumers by surrounding commodities with fantastic meanings, then the two museums examined here take this process to another, more ethereal level, by displacing attention from the commodity to the economies of desire that precede its existence. The pedagogy of national citizenship reaches an immaterial stage: the physical commodity vanishes and emotion become the object of production and consumption.

As various critics of contemporary consumption practices have noted, in contexts where those who can consume already have what they need, the only way forward is through the production of desire. Commodities — from shoes to buildings — are now surrounded with elaborate emotional landscapes that become the primary object of consumption. The product is a tertiary support for the culture of the brand, which does not simply reflect desire, but interactively produces it. In this respect, the museum of emotional consumption may be understood as the symbolic flagship of economies that are being restructured around services and the rise of “immaterial labor,” or work in which caring and the transmission of emotion are the main products.

Both the USHMM and the Apartheid Museum participate in this broader pedagogy of citizenship, while defining and promoting heritage industries related to their core thematics. The USHMM is widely acknowledged as a global center for Holocaust studies, which like all areas of academic research, is embedded in, and productive of, larger economic processes. It is also an economic force in itself, not only through the busy gift shop where Holocaust and USHMM memorabilia can be purchased, but through the substantial impact of the museum on tourism to Washington, D.C. The Apartheid Museum, with its privatized administrative structure and its conceptual interconnection with national economic policy, also reflects the constraints and possibilities of post-Apartheid economic development. This is underscored by its location within a theme park where the gold mine, once the primary (but now depleted) site of production in Johannesburg’s urban economy, is transformed into a spectacular site of consumption. In both cases, apocalyptic narratives of national history represent both the endgame of consumption and its precarious possibilities as a strategy for national growth in a global context.

Inasmuch as both institutions work to separate the past from the present, both constitute models of collective self-identity that are ahistorical. The temporal boundaries they erect mean that, for example, it is possible to represent Israel as a homeland for survivors of the Holocaust without examin-
ing the wider context of Middle East politics and the struggles over Palestine. Likewise, the scenes of a great, multicultural family embraced by Nelson Mandela at the conclusion of the Apartheid Museum displace understanding of how the dynamics of structural racism continue in the so-called post-Apartheid present. In both cases, experiential history is offered as a way through to a timeless, universal humanity, a precondition for a model of national citizenship that seeks to transcend even the global.

POSTSCRIPT: MOURNING OF THE ETERNAL PRESENT

It’s “mourning in America,” to play on the famous slogan that helped secure Ronald Reagan’s second presidential election victory in 1984. I am standing at the edge of where the World Trade Center complex once stood. It is now a vast construction site, visible through a wire mesh fence. The enclosure acts as a support for a series of illustrated panels that tell the story of New York’s history from the nineteenth century to the present. The narrative describes the city’s history as involving an irrepressible rise from setbacks and disasters, one that now includes 9/11 (fig. 18). The crowd move slowly from panel to panel, while some stop to photograph the crucifix made of rusting steel sections from the fallen towers that stands on the site. The panels describe a narrative of progressive history, in which each disaster is followed by struggle and collective triumph.

Descending into the temporary PATH urban rail terminal at one end of the site (a simple shed-like building that will be removed as the structures that surround it are completed), commuters are brought down into the original Word Trade Center excavation, almost to its base. From here it is possible to see the crucifix again — and on the other side, the “slurry wall.” But this is only seen by looking through a mesh screen.
that contains uplifting quotations by famous Americans. At one end of the station, new tracks curve toward the temporary platform and stop abruptly, awaiting completion of a new transit terminal designed by Santiago Calatrava.

A large mechanical plant building for the Calatrava structure is slated for construction at the northeastern corner of the memorial park. According to the master plan designed by Daniel Libeskind, building to house two of the much-disputed cultural amenities for the site was also to be located here. And after a call for proposals, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) selected the tenants: the Drawing Center (a Soho art gallery), and the International Freedom Center (IFC), a new institution that proposed to “explore freedom as a constantly evolving world movement in which America has played a leading role.”

The Norwegian architectural firm Snohetta designed the building to wrap around 40,000 sq. ft. of mechanical equipment with a sequence ramps and voids, while also straddling the platform area of the transit terminal below.

The programming proposed by the IFC can be criticized for its teleological — even imperial — view of history, its abstracted celebration of freedom, and its apparent conflation of free societies with free-market societies. The contradictions at the heart of the project were exemplified by the uncertainty over how to end the “Freedom Walk,” a linear route describing the progress of freedom through history. When the design was made public, an image of an Iraqi voter was removed from a prominent illustration depicting the conclusion, and replaced with one of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Lyndon Johnson, a fact prominent illustration depicting the conclusion, and replaced with one of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Lyndon Johnson, a fact.

The net effect has been not only to eliminate the IFC and the Drawing Center from the site, but also to severely limit the breadth of public discourse. Initial plans called for the IFC and the World Trade Center Memorial to be connected, with the two institutions, respectively acting as the “brain and heart” of the rebuilt World Trade Center.7 The departure of the IFC has turned the memorial (now referred to as a memorial museum) into an ahistorical sequence of “object-survivors” culled from the rubble of the collapsed towers. Massive steel columns, rusting and scarred, a fire truck with its crushed cab and mangled body, and the broadcast antennae from the roof are among the rescued artifacts to be installed as permanent witnesses to the destruction of the towers.7 Indeed, the entire crypt-like building (which includes the slurry wall as a major part of its cavernous interior space) has been cast as an iconic survivor. As Steven M. Davis, one of the architects for the scheme, has stated: “Normally the icon contains the exhibit. . . . Here the icon is the exhibit.”

Burlingame’s position toward “activists and academics” who she claimed were “salivating at holding forth” was amplified in subsequent protests organized by the Take Back the Memorial group. In polarizing rhetoric reminiscent of the Cold War, the programming of the IFC was described “anti-American” and unpatriotic. The presence of the Drawing Center was also challenged after it was revealed that it had held an exhibition containing work that was critical of recent U.S. foreign policy. The campaign against the memorial continues today with demands to remove it from the underground location established for it through an international design competition, and house it in a redesigned above-ground facility.

As has been noted elsewhere, the transformation of the site into a battleground of immense, even sacred national importance occurred almost immediately after the attacks. President Bush led the way by referring to 9/11 as an attack on “freedom” and the “American Way of Life,” rather than, as was largely the case in the international media, an attack on symbols of U.S. global financial and military power. Governor George Pataki of New York (who ultimately retains control over the direction of development on the former World Trade Center site) reiterated this viewpoint, publicly equating the 9/11 memorial project with Pearl Harbor and the beaches of Normandy. He entered the fray over the cultural facilities and sided with those who opposed the two institutions. Pataki barred the IFC from the site in July 2005; around the same time, the Drawing Center announced plans to relocate to a building in the renovated Fulton Street Fish Market. The World Trade Center Memorial will now extend above ground and occupy a smaller version of the building that was originally intended for the IFC and the Drawing Center.7

The World Trade Center Memorial will now extend above ground and occupy a smaller version of the building that was originally intended for the IFC and the Drawing Center.7

The Lower Manhattan Development Corp. is handing over millions of federal dollars and the keys to that building to some of the very same people who consider the post-9/11 provisions of the Patriot Act more dangerous than the terrorists that they were enacted to apprehend — people whose inflammatory claims of a deliberate torture policy at Guantanamo Bay are undermining this country’s efforts to foster freedom. . . .
of contemplative self-abstraction. The exhibition route spirals downward to bedrock, past images of “everyday life” at the World Trade Center between 1993 and 2001 and displays that document the attacks on 9/11, to culminate with a massive subterranean chamber focused on the slurry wall. Some 9,100 unidentified remains will be kept in an adjacent repository, with a contemplation room nearby, complete with a symbolic vessel open to the sky. As the Senior Vice President for Memorial and Cultural Development at the LMDC has said, “It’s going to be sensual, graphic and very honest.”

In February 2006, the LMDC announced that Alice M. Greenwald, an associate director for museum programs at the USHMM, would become the Director of the World Trade Center Memorial Museum. Greenwald began working at the USHMM as a consultant in 1986, and was part of the original design team for its permanent exhibition. The influence of the USHMM on the development of the project was apparent even before her appointment, both in the changing conception of the facility as a “memorial museum” and in its presentation of a sequential narrative that climaxes in ghostly encounters with damaged object-survivors.

The World Trade Center Memorial Museum, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Apartheid Museum all represent history as a way through to a discourse of a universal humanity. Yet if these institutions and others like them share strategies of empathy and geopolitical transcendence, the WTC Memorial Museum moves this technology of citizenship to another level. Here the climatic moment of death and rebirth radiates outward from a sentient core to overtake the entire exhibition. Any references to the broader social and historical conditions that may have led to the attacks on 9/11 have been barred from the site as profane violations of the rights of the dead.

Although its advocates argue that this version of collective mourning occupies a sanctified space outside politics, it does so through the political act of placing national history in an eternal present, where it can operate as the unconscious supplement to the very real and terrifying violence of U.S. imperialism. As Warwick Tie has noted, in this configuration of sovereign power, “brutality embraces affection.” The contested realm of collective, public memory is replaced by an accumulation of private emotions and individual commemorations, with the heroic nation-state constituted as their mute guarantor. The memorial museum now under construction at Ground Zero formalizes this psychic economy. Albums and stories of the dead will be gathered together in a library of individual memories, with scarred remnants of the twin towers recast as their somatic backdrop. The dead and their object-survivors are destined to become the guardians of the silence that now engulfs the site.

REFERENCE NOTES

I would like to thank Katerina Ruedi Ray, Lesley Lokko, and Anna Williams for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.


2. See the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience 2003 Conference Report, p.2. At present, the coalition includes thirteen sites: The District Six Museum (South Africa); Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site (U.S.A.); National Civil Rights Museum (U.S.A.); Gulag Museum at Perm-36 (Russia); Japanese American National Museum (U.S.A.); Liberation War Museum (Bangladesh); Lower East Side Tenement Museum (U.S.A.); Terezin Museum (Czech Republic); Women’s Rights National Historic Park (U.S.A.); Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site (U.S.A.); Maison Des Esclaves (Senegal); Memoria Abierta (Argentina); and the Workhouse (U.K.). The coalition maintain informal connections with a wide range of human-rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, the Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights, and the International Center for Mediation and Conflict Resolution, which advise on how to link the histories told at the sites to contemporary human-rights issues.


Entitled “Tools for Tolerance,” the courses provide California-state-certified training to assist staff supervisors to gain expertise in certain leadership skills and infuse those skills in a paramilitary organizational structure. See the “Tools for Tolerance” section of the Museum of Tolerance website at www.museumoftolerance.com.

5. E. Rothstein, “Slavery’s Harsh History is Portrayed in Promised Land.” New York Times, Wednesday, August 18, 2004, p.B1. Rothstein writes: “At the exhibit’s end, in a room called Dialogue Zone, a social worker greets visitors, who may feel overwhelmed by the trauma — or perhaps upset that the original subject, so powerfully touched upon, has been so lost in a cloud of righteous feeling. One posted ground rule reads: ‘Avoid terms and phrases which define, demean, or devalue others, and use words that are affirmative and reflect a positive value.’”

6. The most recent, and perhaps the most controversial entry to the field is the current proposal for a branch of the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem, to be designed by Frank Gehry—a $200 million campus devoted to exhibitions and lectures that will examine the history of anti-Semitism as a chronicler of “man’s inhumanity to man.” S.G. Freedman, “Frank Gehry’s Mid-East Peace Plan,” New York Times, August 1, 2004, p.A1. An NPR report on February 24, 2006 by Linda Gradstein revealed that the museum will be built on top of a portion of a Muslim graveyard, and construction has been temporarily stopped by the Israeli Supreme Court. See “Israel Debates Sites for Tolerance Museum” at http://www.npr.org/programs/day/transcripts/2006/feb/060224b.gradstein.html#email.

The Jerusalem branch of the Museum of Tolerance will be the third major institution linked to the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. The second is the New York Tolerance Center, opened in February 2004. It replicates many of the displays in the Los Angeles headquarters, including the “Point of View Diner,” an interactive display in a restaurant setting, where visitors seated at tables may use juke box controls to register responses to questions that test for intolerance. Although the Los Angeles museum is open to the general public, the New York branch is “a professional development training center” for “front line professionals” in the criminal justice system. It seeks to build on the success of the Web-based “Tools for Tolerance” program operated by the Los Angeles branch of the Tolerance Museum, which has trained more than 70,000 people through its online courses. Four other offices, in Toronto, Canada; Paris, France; Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Boca Raton, Florida, extend the activities of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles by monitoring bigotry and anti-Semitism in their respective contexts. See “Tools for Tolerance” at museumoftolerance.org.


10. J. Lennon and M. Foley, Dark Tourism: The Attractions of Death and Disaster (New York and London: Continuum, 2000), p.12. The authors suggest that it is the commodification of anxiety and doubt, and the design of sites as both products and experiences that qualify them as dark tourism. But these narratives are now invariably in a space somewhere between the global and the local” (p.96).

The historical development of the exhibitionary complex can be traced to colonial contexts. See T. Mitchell, Colonizing Egypt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). When describing travelers to Cairo in the nineteenth century, Mitchell notes: “Reality was that which presented itself as exhibit, so nothing else would have been thinkable. Living within a world of signs, they took semiosis to be a universal condition, and set about describing the Orient as if it were an exhibition” (p.14). 21. N.G. Finkelstein, The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering (London: Verso, 2003), p.81.

22. After initial controversy, the USHMM was developed with the goal of “Americanizing” the Holocaust. The definition of who the institution was intended to memorialize was expanded to be as inclusive as possible, with
the Executive Order establishing federal support for the museum stating that the new institution should honor the memory of “all the victims of the Holocaust — 6 million Jews and 5 million other people.” The effort to move beyond “ethnic” Jewish memory was deemed essential to making the museum relevant to non-Jewish Americans. See E.T. Linenthal, Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp.41–45.

In practice, the Museum is focused largely on the Jewish experience of the Holocaust, with supplemental references to other affected populations. The representation of Jewish populations is sufficiently abstract as to permit a wide range of identifications, and they effectively become nonethnically Jews. See G. Crysler and A. Kusno, “Angels in the Temple: The Aesthetic Construction of Citizenship at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,” The Art Journal, Vol.56 No.1 (Spring 1997), pp.52–64.

23. Recent attendance figures for the USHMM posted on its website in March 2006 state that since it opened in 1994, there have been 23 million visitors, of which 17.3 million have been “non-Jews,” or more 75 percent of the total. Some 7.8 million of the total were schoolchildren, 3 million were minorities, and 2.8 million were international visitors.


25. The Apartheid Museum was initially conceived by Solly Krok, a co-owner with his brother of the holding company Akami Egoli, which controls the Gold Reef City theme park and casino. Krok visited the USHMM twice when the initial plans for the museum were being developed, and as a result insisted that the Apartheid Museum be organized around similar narrative structure. For details of Krok’s Holocaust epiphany, see J. Gordin, “Looking Back in Horror and Wonder at Apartheid: Tycoon Solly Krok finds Inspiration for Johannesburg’s New Apartheid Museum while Visiting a Memorial to the Holocaust in Washington,” The Sunday Independent (South Africa), November 18, 2001, p.4.

26. Almost half the total visitors to the Apartheid Museum are from South Africa; the rest are from other national contexts. Attendance at the Apartheid Museum is evenly split between domestic and international visitors, with adults as 70 percent of the total number of visitors, and 30 percent children. In the first year of operation (2001–2002), total attendance was 300,000, evenly split between domestic and international visitors. These figures were provided by the Apartheid Museum in 2002 and updated in November, 2004.

27. This discussion draws upon aspects of earlier research presented in Crysler and Kusno, “Angels in the Temple.” I gratefully acknowledge the contributions of my co-author, Abidin Kusno, to that article, many of which have played a formative role in developing this text. The research for that article was completed in 1995–96. I visited the USHMM again in 2004 to assess how the museum, and in particular, the permanent exhibition had changed. See also J. Young, The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); and J. Young, ed., The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History (New York: Prestel, 1994).

28. As both candidate and president, Carter supported the Palestinian right to an independent homeland. He further inflamed controversy when, in 1978 he linked the sale of aircraft previously promised to Israel to the sale of aircraft to Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The plans for the USHMM were initiated as these debates continued in Congress in the same year. The President’s Commission on the Holocaust was established in 1978 to make recommendations for a memorial dedicated to those who died in the Holocaust. See Linenthal, Preserving Memory, pp.1–5.


30. Magnetized identity cards are also issued to arriving visitors. These provide access to interactive stations at various points in the permanent exhibition that relay the fate of the person depicted.

31. For further elaboration on the role of metonymy in the exhibition narrative, see Crysler and Kusno, “Angels in the Temple,” p.61.

32. Part of the pleasure associated with the vicarious experience of pain on the third floor results from the sense of relief visitors feel from the crowded and demanding cognitive regime of the fourth floor. Crysler and Kusno, “Angels in the Temple,” p.59. See also Landsberg, Prosthetic Memory, p.312.

33. More than ten thousand items relating to the Holocaust, from art and articles of clothing to objects created in the camps, were donated to the USHMM. These are called “object survivors” by the curatorial staff. See Linenthal, Preserving Memory, p.145.

34. The Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation was founded by Steven Spielberg following his encounter with Holocaust survivors while filming Schindler’s List. Between 1994 and 1999, the foundation collected 57,000 testimonies by survivors, rescuers, liberators and war-crimes trial participants. See the Shoah Foundation website at www.ushmm.org/


36. Ibid., p.1

37. Ibid. Felman writes of the Eichman trial: “The trial was a conscious legal effort not just to give the victims a voice and a stage, to break the silence of the trauma, to divulge and to uncover secrets and taboos, but to transform these discoveries into one national collective story, to assemble, consciously, meticulously, diligently, an unprecedented public and collective legal record of mass trauma that formerly existed only in the repressed form of a series of untold, fragmented stories and traumatic memories” (p.7).


39. The walls of the Hall of Remembrance have vertical slit window that frame partial views of significant Washington monuments. “Why’ asked Freed, ‘do you consciously make openings when you can see the various American icons on the Mall? Because these are the things that save you.” Linenthal, Preserving Memory, p.102.


41. In Present Pasts, Huysen argues that the inscription of tropes and images, ethical and
political evaluations function “like a prism that helps focus the local discourse in both its legal and commemorative aspects” (p.98).

42. The Kroks owned Twin Pharmaceuticals, the company that produced the skin-lightening cream. C. Bauer, “Speaking for Itself, and for All of Us,” Sunday Times (South Africa), December 2, 2001, p.24.


44. Ibid., p.4.

45. The casino contains a mock reconstruction of parts of the 1973 Carlton Hotel and historic photos of the original 1906 building. The historic hotel was replaced by a modern tower of the same name in downtown Johannesburg. The plates, cutlery, and interior fittings from its famous “whites-only” dining room, The Three Ships, are used in a mock re-creation of the same space at the casino. The modern version of the hotel was finally closed in 1997 following the flight of capital from the center of Johannesburg after 1994. See “Something Old, Something New’ Describes the Revival of The Three Ships Restaurant at Gold Reef City,” at HotelandRestaurant.co.za.

46. The building was designed by a consortium of architects led by Sidney Abramowitz, and including the Johannesburg architectural firms Mashabane and Rose and GAPP Architects.


48. The Apartheid Museum plans to revise the permanent exhibition to include more historical material about women. Conversation with Wade Davey, Apartheid Museum, November 20, 2004.


51. Telephone interview with Christopher Till, November 18, 2002. South African Minister of Education Kader Asmal mandated the creation of a new history curriculum and a new set of history textbooks soon after the ANC assumed power in the post-Apartheid government. The Apartheid Museum has been used as a site for teacher-training programs sponsored by Wits University. T. Mtshali, “South Africa is Losing its Memory,” Sunday Times (South Africa), October 3, 2002, p.17.

52. R. Carroll, “Did You See the One about the Racist TV Ads?” The Guardian (London), June 19, 2004. The Apartheid Museum embarked on a national advertising campaign that showcased the telling of racist jokes and then asked viewers to visit if they weren’t able to understand why the jokes were racist.


55. Ibid.

56. Both museums help to sustain Holocaust and Apartheid industries that extend beyond the museums, to include negotiations for reparations, various forms of research, education and cultural production (for both popular and scholarly audiences), international investment, and tourism.


59. The corollary to this is a workforce organized around “immaterial labor” and whose primary object of production is caring. See, for example, M. Hardt and A. Negri, “The Sociology of Immaterial Labor,” in Empire (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp.289–94.

60. The Port Authority added the large space for mechanical equipment to the brief for the building midway through the design process. The size of the plant was later cut in half. See N. Ourousoff, “A Temple of Contemplation and Conflict,” New York Times, May 20, 2005, p.A1.


62. The IFC’s Content and Governance Report explained that visitors would visit an orientation film entitled “To be Free,” which would “show how the World Trade Center attracted people from all over the globe to a place in which national and cultural differences were subsumed in trade and commerce — how Lower Manhattan has, in essence, always been an international freedom center, drawing people to a dream of free and better lives” p.8.

63. See Ourousoff, “A Temple of Contemplation and Conflict.”

64. The campaign circulated a petition that began with the following statement: “We the undersigned, believe that the World Trade Center Memorial should stand as a solemn remembrance of those who died on September 11, 2001, and not as a journey of history’s failures or as a debate about domestic or foreign policy in the post 9/11 world. Political discussions have no place at the World Trade Center September 11th memorial. . . . ” From the extensive documentation of the campaign to stop the IFC on the Take Back the Memorial website at takebackthememorial.org.


66. See the blog and news reports posted at www.takebackthememorial.org.


join with us to support the call for a postponement of the groundbreaking of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation’s flawed memorial. Take Back demands that legitimate talks with Governor Pataki and John Cahill ensue immediately with an aim towards resolving the outstanding issues plaguing the memorial before construction commences. America deserves nothing less.”

73. As quoted in Burlingame, “The Great Ground Zero Heist.”
76. Ibid.
78. Ibid.

All photographs are by the author.